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EXDIS

FOR EA-UNGER FROM BUNKER

REF: SAIGON 24273

WITH REFERENCE TO OUR TELEPHONE CONVERSATION LAST NIGHT ABOUT THE REASONS BEHIND GENERAL LOAN'S TRIP TO WASHINGTON, I FIND THAT WE HAVE VERY LITTLE INDICATION OF WHAT HE HAS IN MIND. I WOULD SPECULATE THAT HE MAY WELL BE PLANNING TO EXPLORE POSSIBILITIES FOR DRUMMING UP SUPPORT FOR THE PRIME MINISTER AS THE MILITARY CANDIDATE FOR PRESIDENT AND POSSIBLY TRYING

PAGE 2 RUMJIR 24733 S E C R E T
TO LINE UP SOME FUNDS THAT MIGHT BE USED DIRECTLY OR INDIRECTLY FOR THIS SAME GENERAL PURPOSE. HE MAY WELL HAVE OTHER MORE SPECIFIC REASONS RELATED TO HIS OWN MSS ACTIVITIES. REGARDLESS OF HIS SUCCESS OR LACK OF SUCCESS IN FINDING SOME SUPPORT, I WOULD EXPECT THAT ON HIS RETURN HE WILL IN ANY CASE TRY TO GIVE THE IMPRESSION OF SUCCESS. WE DO NOT HAVE ANY INFORMATION AVAILABLE AS TO WHAT PERSONS HE PLANS TO GET IN TOUCH WITH OR WHAT AMBASSADOR BUI DIEM MAY HAVE ARRANGED FOR HIM. BUNKER

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1. IN A RECENT CONVERSATION WITH FOREIGN MINISTER TRAN VAN DO, LATTER INFORMED POLITICAL COUNSELOR ABOUT TALKS HE HAD HAD WITH PRIME MINISTER KY AND GENERAL THIEU FOLLOWING HIS RETURN FROM WASHINGTON.

2. MUCH OF THE CONVERSATION RELATED TO THE MILITARY RIVALRY FOR THE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDACY. IT ADDED LITTLE THAT WAS NEW TO OUR RECENT REPORTS ON KY'S AND THIEU'S VIEWS. THE FOLLOWING POINTS MAY BE OF INTEREST, HOWEVER.

3. DO'S REPORT OF THIEU'S VIEW OF THINGS WAS VERY MUCH ALONG THE

PAGE 2 RUMJIR 24732 S E C R E T
LINES OF THIEU'S LAST CONVERSATION ON THIS SUBJECT WITH AMBASSADOR LODGE (SAIGON 23667). DO ADDED THAT THIEU HAD SAID THAT IF HE KNEW WHAT THE AMERICANS REALLY WANTED, HE WOULD BE PREPARED TO ACT ACCORDINGLY. IF, FOR INSTANCE, THE U.S. WISHED A CIVILIAN PRESIDENT TO BE ELECTED, HE, THIEU, WOULD BE PREPARED TO STEP ASIDE. DO PAUSED EXPECTANTLY AT THAT POINT, AND POLITICAL COUNSELOR REITERATED OUR POSITION THAT THIS MATTER IS ONE FOR THE VIETNAMESE TO DECIDE AND THAT OUR MAIN CONCERNS WERE THAT THERE SHOULD BE NO SERIOUS SPLIT WITHIN THE MILITARY AND THAT AS BROAD A NATIONAL BASE AS POSSIBLE FOR MILITARY AND CIVILIAN COOPERATION SHOULD BE CREATED. DO SAID THAT THIEU WAS STILL THINKING IN TERMS OF TRYING TO DEVELOP SOME TYPE OF CIVILIAN "CONVENTION" TO GIVE BROAD POPULAR SUPPORT FOR THE MILITARY CANDIDATE (SAIGON 22274).

4. DO ADDED THAT HE HAD OF COURSE CONVEYED THE WASHINGTON CONCERN THAT THERE BE NO CLASH BETWEEN KY AND THIEU ON THE QUESTION OF THE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDACY. DO SAID HE WAS CONFIDENT FROM HIS CONVERSATIONS WITH BOTH OF THEM THAT SUCH A CLASH WOULD NOT

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OCCUR. HE DID NOT SEEM TO KNOW HOW THE ULTIMATE DECISION WOULD BE MADE, HOWEVER.

5. DO THEN REMARKED THAT IN HIS CONVERSATION WITH PRIME MINISTER KY THE SAME DAY HE HAD REITERATED A WARNING THAT HE HAD MADE BEFORE HIS TRIP TO WASHINGTON. HE SAID HE HAD WARNED KY THAT HE SHOULD KEEP HIS "YOUNG OFFICERS" FROM ENGAGING IN UNDESIRABLE ACTIVITIES WHICH WOULD GET HIM INTO TROUBLE. IT WAS EVIDENT FROM THE CONVERSATION THAT DO HAD PARTICULARLY, BUT NOT EXCLUSIVELY, GENERAL LOAN IN MIND. APPARENTLY KY WAS NON-COMMITTAL.

6. COMMENT: AS THE DEPARTMENT KNOWS, DO IS MUCH CLOSER TO THIEU THAN TO KY AND THERE IS LITTLE REAL COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE PRIME MINISTER AND THE FOREIGN MINISTER. DO'S COMMENTS ABOUT THIEU'S REMARKS SHOULD THEREFORE BE VIEWED IN THAT LIGHT.

7. WE READ THIEU'S COMMENTS REPORTED BY DO AS EBWD*ANOTHER EFFORT TO SMOKE OUT AMERICAN VIEWS REGARDING THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION, THIS TIME PERHAPS IN THE LIGHT OF THE CHANGE IN AMBASSADORS IN SAIGON. IT IS OF COURSE CONCEIVABLE THAT IF THIEU BELIEVED WE FAVORED A CIVILIAN PRESIDENT, HE MIGHT SEE A POSSIBILITY OF ALLYING HIMSELF WITH A CIVILIAN CANDIDATE, PERHAPS

EITHER IN THE VICE PRESIDENTIAL SPOT OR AS PRIME MINISTER. THIS MIGHT NOT ONLY ASSURE HIM OF A PROMINENT CONTINUING ROLE, BUT COULD ALSO BE A MEANS FOR REDUCING KY'S PROSPECTS AS PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE.

8. OTHER INDICATIONS TO DATE ARE THAT THE QUESTION OF THE MILITARY CANDIDATE REMAINS UNRESOLVED, AND PROBABLY WILL NOT BE SETTLED UNTIL THE ELECTORAL LAW IS COMPLETED.

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SUBJ: CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY: MAY 2 (AFTERNOON) AND MAY 3 SESSIONS.

REF : SAIGON 24451

1. AFTERNOON MAY 2 CA DECIDED THAT PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE MUST BE "INTRODUCED" BY 30 ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES OF THE PEOPLE, THAT IS ANY COMBINATION OF THIRTY DEPUTIES, PROVINCIAL OR MUNICIPAL COUNCILLORS. (THERE ARE 116 DEPUTIES AND APPROXIMATELY 470 COUNCILLORS.)

EACH REPRESENTATIVE WILL BE ALLOWED TO ENDORESE ONLY ONE LIST. THUS NEW PARAGRAPH 7 OF ARTICLE 10 READS AS FOLLOWS (FIRST 6 PARAGRAPHS WERE APPROVED WITHOUT CHANGE):

QUOTE ARTICLE 10 (7). CANDIDATES MUST BE INTRODUCED BY AT LEAST 30 POPULARLY ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES (DEPUTIES AND MUNICIPAL OR PROVINCIAL COUNCILLORS). EACH REPRESENTATIVE CAN ONLY INTRODUCE ONE LIST. UNQUOTE

2. CA APPROVED WITH ONLY ONE MINOR CHANGE ARTICLE 11. A NUMBER OF DEPUTIES DID, HOWEVER, PROPOSE DELETION OF PARAGRAPHS 8 AND 9. FIRST DEALS WITH GVN OFFICIALS AND MILITARY CANDIDATES WHO HAVE LEFT THEIR JOBS FOR DISCIPLINARY REASONS. DEPUTY NGUYEN HUU HIEU ARGUED THAT IN PAST TOO MANY GVN OFFICIALS HAD BEEN UNJUSTLY DISMISSED TO WARRANT SUCH A PGHAISION. SEVERAL DEPUTIES WHO HAVE BEEN CIVIL SERVANTS AGREED WITH HIEU. PARAGRAPH 9 PROSCRIBES CANDIDATES WHO HAVE DIRECTLY OR INDIRECTLY WORKED FOR COMMUNISM OR PRO-COMMUNIST NEUTRALISM. NGUYEN HUU HIEU PROPOSED THAT THIS PROVISION ALSO BE DELETED BECAUSE DETERMINATION OF WHO IS COMMUNIST OR PRO-COMMUNIST NEUTRALIST SHOULD BE MADE BY COURTS. DEPUTY THACH SUNG ASKED DRAFTING COMMITTEE WHAT KIND OF DOCUMENTS NEEDED TO PROVE SOMEONE A COMMUNIST OR NEUTRALIST. HIS QUESTION LEFT UNAMSWERED

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AND CA PROCEEDED APPROVE BOTH PARAGRAPHS 8 AND 9 BY RATHER SUBSTANTIAL MAJORITIES. ONLY CHANGE IN ARTICLE 11 MADE IN FIRST SENTENCE OF FINAL PARAGRAPH WHERE PHRASE "BEFORE NOVEMBER 1, 1963" CHANGED TO "BEFORE APRIL 1, 1967."

3. CA BEGAN MAY 3 SESSION BY APPROVING ARTICLE 12 WITHOUT CHANGE. BALANCE OF MORNING DEVOTED TO ARTICLE 13 WHICH DEALS WITH FILING OF CANDIDACY. MAIN POINTS OF CONTROVERSY WERE WHETHER CA SHOULD FIX DATE FOR FILING OR LEAVE THAT DETAIL TO EXECUTIVE BRANCH AND WHETHER DEPOSIT SHOULD BE REQUIRED OF CANDIDATES. IN BOTH CASES ORIGINAL PROVISIONS OF COMMITTEE DRAFT RETAINED. SOUTHERN RENAISSANCE DEPUTY NGUYEN VAN SANG MANAGED TO PROVOKE RATHER SHARP REACTION FROM ARVN COLONEL DAM VAN QUY WHEN HE PROPOSED THAT MILITARY CANDIDATES MUST SHOW EVIDENCE THAT THEY HAVE BEEN DEMOBILIZED OR ARE ON LONG TERM LEAVE WITHOUT PAY. QUY ACCUSED SANG OF HOLDING ARMY IN CONTEMPT AND NOT RECOGNIZING ITS SACRIFICES. CA CHAIRMAN SUU CAUTIONED DEPUTIES NOT TO CREATE DIVISIONS BETWEEN CIVILIANS AND MILITARY SINCE TO DO SO ONLY BENEFITS COMMUNISTS. CA APPROVED SANG'S PROPOSAL.

4. ARTICLE 13 AS FINALLY APPROVED HAS 9 INSTEAD OF 7 CLAUSES. IT ALSO REFERS TO CA SIMPLY AS "THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY" DROPPING QUALIFYING PHRASE "POPULARLY ELECTED ON SEPTEMBER 11, 1966". ARTICLE NOW READS AS FOLLOWS:

QUOTE ARTICLE 13. CANDIDATES' APPLICATIONS WILL BE SUBMITTED TO THE OFFICE OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY AT THE LATEST ON MID-NIGHT JULY 5, 1967, AND MUST BE ACCOMPANIED BY THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS:

(A) A BIRTH CERTIFICATE OR A DOCUMENT REPLACING IT.

(B) A #2 POLICE RECORD NOT OLDER THAN THREE MONTHS.

(C) AN AFFIDAVIT THAT THE CANDIDATE HAS HAD CONTINUOUS RESIDENCE ON VIETNAMESE TERRITORY FOR TEN YEARS IMMEDIATELY PRIOR TO ELECTION DAY.

(D) A CERTIFICATE THAT THE CANDIDATE HAS COMPLIED WITH MILITARY DRAFT REGULATIONS.

(E) CERTIFICATES FROM POPULARLY ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES REFERRED TO IN ARTICLE 10.

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(F) IN THE CASE OF MILITARY PERSONNEL AND CIVIL SERVANTS, A DOCUMENT INDICATING PERMISSION TO GO ON LEAVE WITHOUT PAY.

(G) A RECEIPT FOR THE DEPOSIT MENTIONED IN ARTICLE 21.

(H) A LIST OF REPRESENTATIVES WHO WILL SERVE ON THE CENTRAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN COMMITTEE PROVIDED FOR IN ARTICLE 18.

(I) SYMBOLS OF THE LIST AND FIVE 4 BY 6 PHOTOGRAPHS OF EACH CANDIDATE.

WHEN IT RECEIVES AN APPLICATION, THE OFFICE OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY MUST IMMEDIATELY ISSUE A RECEIPT TO THE PERSONS FILING IT. LISTS OF CANDIDATES WILL BE ARRANGED ACCORDING TO THE SEQUENCE IN WHICH THEY FILE FOLLOWING HOUR, DAY AND MONTH. UNQUOTE

5. CA REVISED ARTICLE 14 SO THAT ALL LISTS FILING CANDIDACY WILL BE POSTED FOR FIRST TIME IF THEY HAVE SUBMITTED NECESSARY DOCUMENTS, IRRESPECTIVE OF WHETHER OR NOT THEY ARE CONSIDERED QUALIFIED. ARTICLE NOW READS AS FOLLOWS:

QUOTE ARTICLE 14. THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY HAS THE FOLLOWING RESPONSIBILITIES:

(A) TO RECEIVE APPLICATIONS AND DOCUMENTS OF CANDIDATES.

(B) TO EXAMINE CANDIDATES' DOCUMENTS INCLUDING THOSE MENTIONED IN ARTICLE 13.

WITHIN 24 HOURS OF RECEIPT OF ALL APPLICATIONS FOR CANDIDACY, THE OFFICE OF THE NATIONAL ASEMBLY WILL POST FOR THE FIRST TIME AT THE ASSEMBLY'S PLACE OF BUSINESS LISTS OF CANDIDATES WHO HAVE SUBMITTED DOCUMENTS REQUIRED BY ARTICLE 13. AT THE SAME TIME, THE OFFICE OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY WILL TRANSMIT THE LISTS TO THE SPECIAL COMMISSARIAT FOR ADMINISTRATION FOR POSTING AT ALL MUNICIPAL, PROVINCIAL, DISTRICT AND VILLAGE OFFICES. UNQUOTE

6. ARTICLE 15 WAS APPROVED WITH FOLLOWING ADDITION TO THIRD PARAGRAPH:

QUOTE BEFORE THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY MEETS IN PLENARY SESSION TO

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TAKE A FINAL VOTE ON THE QUESTION OF POSTING LISTS FOR THE SECOND TIME, CANDIDATES ON LISTS AGAINST WHICH COMPLAINTS HAVE BEEN FILED MAY BE INVITED TO PRESENT THEIR CASES BEFORE THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. UNQUOTE

7. CA MODIFIED ARTICLE 16 SO THAT CENTRAL ELECTION COUNCIL WILL HAVE ONLY 4 MEMBERS. (DEPUTIES VOTED TO DROP DEAN OF NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR ADMINISTRATION AND CHAIRMAN OF INSPECTORATE FROM COUNCIL.) AFTER VOTE THERE WERE SEVERAL PROPOSALS TO RESTORE COUNCIL'S MEMBERSHIP TO 6 OR 7 BY ADDITION OF CA DEPUTIES OR PROVINCIAL AND MUNICIPAL COUNCILLORS. NONE OF THESE PROPOSALS RECEIVED SUFFICIENT VOTES TO BE PASSED. DEPUTIES LIKEWISE REJECTED PROPOSAL THAT A REPRESENTATIVE OF GVN SECURITY AGENCY BE ON COUNCIL.

8. CA WILL RECONVENE AFTERNOON MAY 4.

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SUBJ: PHAM VAN THUOI RUNS FOR PRESIDENT

1. PUBLICIST PHAM VAN THUOI ANNOUNCED HIS CANDIDACY IN AN INTERVIEW WITH THE SAIGON DAILY NEWS PUBLISHED MAY 4.

2. THUOI IS NOT RELATED TO NGUYEN VAN THUOI, PUBLISHER OF THE BANNED VIETNAM GUARDIAN. HE WAS BRN IN BAC LIEU PROVINCE AROUND FIFTY YEARS AGO AND GRADUATED FROM TABERD SECONDARY SCHOOL. HE HAS REPORTEDLY PUBLISHED MANY BOOKS, INCLUDING TRANSLATIONS OF CHINESE CLASSICS, AND HE REPORTEDLY OWNS THE PRINTING SHOP OPERATED BY CAPITAL COUNCILWOMAN TRAN KIM THOA.

RSR

3. THUOI BRIEFLY PUBLISHED A DAILY NEWSPAPER CALLED MOI BEFORE THE GENEVA CONFERENCE, AND AFTER THE NOVEMBER 1963 COUP HE PUBLISHED ANOTHER, HOM NAYN WHICH WAS SOON SUSPENDED. HE NOW HAS A TAILOR SHOP FACING CITY HALL.

4. THUOI REPORTEDLY MADE A FORTUNE IN PIASTER TRAFFICKING DUE TO HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH GEN. MAI HUU XUAN, AND HE WAS INVOLVED IN AN EMBEZZLEMENT AFFAIR AT A JUNIOR CHAMBER OF COMMERCE FAIR IN DIEM DAYS.

(1)

5. THUOI TOLD THE DAILY NEWS HE AND HIS FRIENDS, MEMBERS OF THE MIDDLE CLASS EXERCISING LIBERAL PROFESSIONS, PLAN TO WRITE PLATFORM AND FIELD SEVERAL CONGRESSIONAL CANDIDATES IN COMING ELECTIONS. HE SAYS HE STANDS FOR "NATIONAL COALITION GOVERNMENT" BUT NOT WITH COMMUNISTS, ECONOMIC FREEDOM, AND STRONG GOVERNMENT BASED ON RULE OF LAW.

6. THUOI'S CANDIDACY NOT TAKEN SERIOUSLY HERE AND SOME VIETNAMESE OBSERVERS DESCRIBE IT AS PUBLICITY STUNT. BUNKER
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A-638 NO. SECRET HANDLING INDICATORS

TO : DEPARTMENT OF STATE

EXDIS

COPY NO. 1 SERIES A

FROM : AMERICAN EMBASSY, SAIGON DATE: May 5, 1967

SUBJECT : Assessment of Presidential Candidates

REF : A) State 170045; B) Saigon 17704; C) Saigon 19123; D) Dept Paper Titled "Analysis of Alternative Presidential Slates in South Viet-Nam"

1. (a) Our preliminary assessment of Presidential candidates, contained in Reference B, still stands in most respects. We are also in general agreement with the comments in the section on "Potential Candidates" in Reference D. The following should be read as an effort to update and refine those two assessments of Presidential candidates.

(b) Our assessment of the drawing power of the military candidate and the relative strength of the top three candidates is based on three assumptions: (1) The question of the military candidacy will be resolved without creating serious divisions within the military; (2) There will be only one military candidate; (3) No substantial faction within the military will ally itself with any of the civilian candidates. These assumptions may not remain valid, in which case the prospects of the civilian candidates would be considerably enhanced.

2. General Nguyen van Thieu. (a) Thieu is not a popular figure, even within the military. Until now he has not generated positive enthusiasm or strong personal loyalties. On the other hand, he is quite acceptable to a wide range of political elements, and there is probably no important group which is absolutely determined to oppose him. Born in Phan Rang and married to a southerner, he does not provoke regional feelings; some southerners regard him as basically southern, while people from the center think of him as at least being close to their region. Thieu also straddles the religious division of the country to some extent because he was raised as a Buddhist and is now a nominal Catholic (his wife is Catholic).

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Drafted by: POL:TJCHeavner/fmt (5/5/67)

Contents and Classification Approved by: POL:JACalhoun

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(b) Thieu's image is sufficiently dignified and "elder" to appeal to traditional groups. As Chief of State for nearly two years, he is well known, but he is not generally connected in the popular mind with the more controversial acts of the present government. His past connections with the Can Lao are now rarely mentioned. We do not believe that aspect of his background would prove important in the election campaign or that it would be a handicap if he were elected. In some circles, however, Thieu has an unfortunate reputation as a schemer and a master of cold-blooded intrigue.

(c) Perhaps the most salient political fact about Thieu is that he is a military man. As such he will encounter automatic resistance from a broad range of political elements who want a civilian government. At the same time, as a military man, Thieu has the very important advantage of being in a much better position to control and use the military establishment than any civilian candidate. He is also better qualified to run the war effort than any civilian candidate. These facts are now increasingly understood by many civilian leaders. Some of them are resigned to the probability that a military man will serve as the first President under the new Constitution. We do not therefore see Vietnamese anti-military traditions and the widespread desire for a civilian government as major detriments to Thieu's candidacy, particularly if he should choose his fellow candidates wisely.

(d) If the military chose Thieu as their candidate, he would probably get solid military backing. Support from the civil service will be less solid, but probably also substantial. If he runs true to form, he will make deals with various of the civilian leaders in an effort to get the votes of their supporters. He has also talked of organizing a broad civilian front to give greater breadth to his popular support. We judge he would have a very good chance of being elected.

(e) On the basis of past performance we believe that we would have little difficulty in working with Thieu if he were President. He has not been personally close to Americans, but he has cooperated with us in an intelligent and effective way.

(f) Although Thieu probably has the capacity to work well with civilian leaders, his present ties appear to be almost exclusively within the military. His future relations with civilian leaders are thus an open question. The quality of his leadership is also uncertain. He is reported to have performed very well as a military commander. However, he has not provided dynamic or vigorous leadership in the present regime. He has consistently preferred to stand in the background and allow Ky to take the lead. His hesitancy and lack of decisiveness has been particularly apparent in recent weeks. This cautious and reserved style might of course prove very effective if he chose a vigorous and popular civilian as his Prime Minister. (This is the present formula, and it has proved reasonably effective.)

3. General Nguyen Cao Ky. (a) Perhaps the most important political aspect of Ky is his capacity for growth. Over the period he has been in office, Ky has learned a great deal. Some Vietnamese observers have in recent weeks characterized him as the best politician on the scene. This would not have been said even a few months ago. He has proved effective in handling the Assembly and winning the support of its membership. In this respect he is far ahead of Thieu and at least on a level with the principal civilian contenders. His performance in Australia, New Zealand, and at Guam also showed that he is capable of increasingly effective political activity in the vitally important field of foreign affairs.

(b) Ky has also shown that he can provide vigorous leadership and that he can make and carry out hard decisions. Many Vietnamese, even including his opponents, say of him that he has one important quality: "He is not afraid to act." In some cases he has not carried through fully on statements promising action, but in general his performance has been good and the failures have often seemed to be poor staff follow-up rather than intentional evasion.

(c) Ky's courage and vigor have proved effective because they are combined with good political judgment. His performance during the Buddhist "struggle" of last year and the cabinet squabble just before and during the Manila Conference revealed him as a man with good political instinct.

(d) Against the above important political and administrative advantages we must balance some heavy disadvantages. Ky is a northerner. He is too young to present what many Vietnamese regard as a proper Presidential image. He is a military man. He has made enemies, particularly among some southern factions and the militant Buddhists. He has a reputation in some circles as a playboy, a man who is "not serious" and who frequently makes impulsive and ill-considered remarks. Among certain groups there is a growing feeling that he doesn't exercise sufficient control over the activities of some of the "young officers" around him, especially Police Director Loan.

(e) We believe that if Ky runs as the military candidate, his chances of winning the election are very good. Like Thieu, if he is chosen as the military candidate, Ky will likely get fairly solid military support. He will probably also be able to count on significant backing from the Civil Service. Although the Hoa Hao is now engaged in an internal struggle for control of their central committee, Ky can probably get a bloc of Hoa Hao votes. Some of the ethnic minorities would be for him, and he would have support from northerners in general. He will have the advantage of control of the national police organization. Some reports indicate Ky may intend to put together a political organization, possibly based on the majority Bloc in the Assembly, to support his candidacy. If this organization is well led and adequately financed, it can probably pick up a sizeable number of votes for Ky.

(f) We have every reason to believe that we can work effectively with Ky if he is elected. His performance with the Assembly suggests that he has at least the capacity to work successfully with civilian leaders. If he can put together an effective civilian team, including a number of Ministers as well

as the Prime Minister, he could form the kind of military-civilian partnership which is required if the new government is to unite the nation and carry out the hard task ahead. If he is willing, we believe Ky can form such a team, but it will not be easy.

4. Tran van Huong. (a) At the present time Huong is considered the strongest civilian candidate on the scene. As a respected elder southern statesman known for his courage and integrity, Huong commands wide support from southerners of all persuasions. There are indications, moreover, that the northern Catholics in the Greater Solidarity Forces will back him. Huong is also fortunate in having an able campaign manager, former Youth Minister Vo Long Trieu. Through Trieu, Huong will probably have the support of southern Catholic groups, the Movement for the Renaissance of the South, and the "old school boys association". Prominent individuals such as former Minister of Economy Au Truong Thanh and former Education Minister Truong are also linked to the Huong campaign through Vo Long Trieu.

(b) Huong is not strong in central Viet-Nam, in part because of his quarrel with the Buddhists when he was Premier in 1964-65. Although Trieu has tried to negotiate with the militant An Quang Buddhists to insure that they will not actively oppose Huong, his candidacy probably will face some Buddhist resistance. He is now trying to persuade southern Buddhist leader Mai Tho Truyen to run as his Vice President. If Truyen agrees, Buddhist opposition may be reduced, but the ticket would be all southern and lacking in regional balance.

(c) Huong's health may be a drawback. Although an American doctor reports that his high blood pressure is well under control, Huong at 63 is clearly not as vigorous or as fit as either of his potential military opponents. Moreover, from a political point of view, the widespread belief that Huong is not a well man is perhaps as important as the actual state of his health.

(d) Huong has a reputation for stubborn inflexibility once he has made up his mind. He is also known to be strongly opposed to military influence on the government. (He reflected this attitude in a conversation with an Emboff, reported Reference C.) These characteristics suggest that Huong might have difficulty in forming a working partnership with the military. He also appears to have a basically paternalistic if not Confucian attitude toward government which might make it difficult for him to work with the strong legislature which the Constitution envisages.

(e) The fact that Huong and Suu are likely to split the southern vote reduces Huong's chances of election. Nevertheless, if the military should be divided, Huong would stand an excellent chance of being elected. If he should run against a military candidate who enjoys solid military support, the odds seem against his election.

(f) Based on the short experience of Huong's three months in office, we have no reason to believe that we could not work well with him if he were elected. His courage, integrity, and devotion to the nation would appear to make him an excellent leader from our point of view. There is the possibility

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that we might find him unduly rigid in some respects, but this would not appear to be a great problem in regard to his working relations with Americans.

(g) We do not consider it a certainty that Huong will run. There are rumors that he will step aside in favor of Suu in order to avoid splitting the southern vote. More important, Huong made the announcement of his candidacy provisional, depending on his reaction to the electoral law. He is clearly in no hurry to leave his refuge in Vung Tau. If he decides that his chances are not very good, it is entirely possible that he will not run.

5. Phan Khac Suu. (a) Like Huong, Suu appeals to the southern voter as an elder southern statesman of established prestige. He is widely known for his opposition to both the French and Diem, and is respected as a former Chief of State. His position as chairman of the Constitutional Assembly further enhances his image. He is a proven vote-getter, having been elected not only to the present Assembly but also - in the face of government opposition - to Diem's 1959 National Assembly. In his running mate, Dr. Phan Quang Dan, Suu has another well-known and widely respected political figure to bolster his ticket. Perhaps Suu's most important asset is the fact that he has very few enemies and is very widely acceptable, even among the military.

(b) Suu has the disadvantage of being popularly regarded - with considerable justice - as a weak personality who has neither the vigor nor the administrative skills to run a government. His health is also uncertain. Moreover, Suu, unlike Huong, appears not to have any organized campaign under way.

(c) Although not as strong a candidate as Huong, Suu is the second choice of a great many people, and for this reason he cannot be counted out of the race. It was his wide acceptability, his quality of being everybody's second choice, that enabled him to win the chairmanship of the Assembly. Also Suu is counting on the military being divided; if in fact some substantial part of the military were to back him as a candidate (thinking they might be able to control him) Suu's chances would be greatly improved. At the moment, however, we rate Suu as running in third place, behind both the military candidate and Huong.

6. Ha Thuc Ky. Ky is well known as the leader of the largest and most influential faction of the Dai Viet party. He probably has considerable support in central Viet-Nam, but little or no appeal to southern voters. Even in central Viet-Nam Ky would be unacceptable in those areas dominated by the VNQDD and is anathema to militant Buddhists. Ky has announced that he is a Presidential candidate and said publicly that he is not interested in a spot on anyone else's ticket. However, he has little hope of winning the Presidency, and it seems likely that he does in fact hope to parlay his support into the second spot on another ticket. (We are in contact with Ky, and will make a fuller assessment of his potential in later messages.)

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7. Nguyen Dinh Quat, Bui Ngoc Phuong, and Pham Van Tuoi. Quat, Phuong, and Tuoi have all announced for the Presidential race, but we are not inclined to take their candidacies seriously. Knowledgeable Vietnamese think they have no hope of winning or even of making a good showing. They are expected to have difficulty in getting an "introduction" by the 30 deputies or provincial councilors required by the electoral law, and we doubt they will actually appear on the ballot for that reason.

8. Exiled Generals. (a) Of the Generals now outside Viet-Nam, probably only Duong Van Minh (Big Minh) and Nguyen Chanh Thi should be considered as possible contenders. Big Minh is genuinely popular in Viet-Nam, and although he has been gone a long time, probably would still make a very good candidate. He is not a strong leader, however, and would probably be a weak President. As a practical matter, it is unlikely that the present military leadership would allow him to return to Viet-Nam to run. (This could happen if the military were to become badly divided, and one or the other faction tried to use Big Minh. But so long as there is any degree of military unity, Big Minh will be viewed as a common threat and excluded accordingly.)

(b) Nguyen Chanh Thi probably retains some support in central Viet-Nam. Those connected with the "struggle" of last year, military personnel and civil servants as well as militant Buddhist clergy and lay followers, would be inclined to back him. He could not get united military support, however. In fact, must of the present military leadership, particularly Ky, would probably be strongly opposed to his return to Viet-Nam. He would have virtually no hope of winning the Presidency. It is possible, however, that he could get a spot on another ticket.

9. Other Possibilities. There are other, less important figures on the scene, some of whom probably will be running as Vice Presidential candidates. Possibilities for the post of Prime Minister may also be considered. We will be reporting on such figures, as the opportunity arises. (An evaluation of Nguyen Lui Vien will be included in future messages.)

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